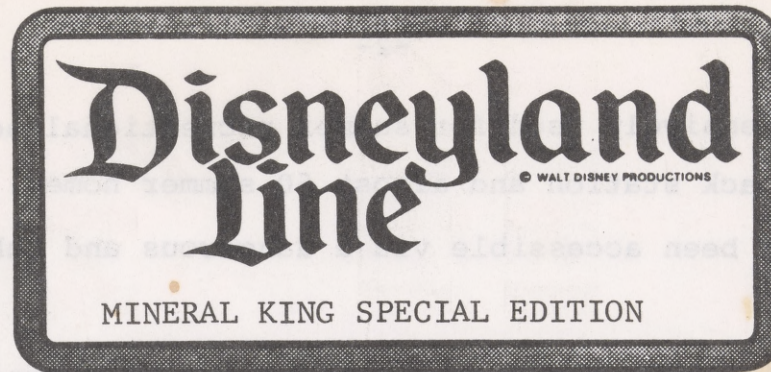




Remarks by E. Cardon Walker,  
President, Walt Disney Productions  
Visalia, California  
May 3, 1972

In calling this press conference to discuss the future of Mineral King today, we would like to begin by setting the record straight once again on the history of this project.

The area known as Mineral King is located in Sequoia National Forest under the administration of the U.S. Forest Service, whose mandate from Congress is to provide a balanced program of land management which takes into consideration the needs of all segments of the American public. This policy has resulted in the establishment of millions of acres of permanently protected primitive or wilderness areas. It also gives the Forest Service authority to designate for use by the general public an area such as Mineral King, which has outstanding year-round recreational potentials, including the complete range of winter sports activities. This has been done in more than 80 other areas.

After many years' experience in the management of Mineral King, the Forest Service determined that the area was, and is, best qualified to fulfill the recreational needs of all Californians. Why? Because of its unmatched potential as a winter recreation site, its natural summer beauty, and because of its proximity to major population centers. It is not a wilderness. Formerly subjected to mining and timbering activities, (continued on next page)



it is now extensively used for summer recreational activities, including a pack station and almost 60 summer homes. For many years, it has been accessible via a dangerous and substandard access road.

Thus, in 1965, the Forest Service issued a prospectus seeking competitive bids for the recreational development of the Mineral King area.

Of the six proposals submitted, the Disney plan was accepted and judged as best serving the public need under the terms of the prospectus.

It was the Forest Service which stipulated in its prospectus that the area must be freely accessible by means of an improved all-weather road, and it continued to maintain that position throughout the three-year period allotted to Walt Disney Productions for the preparation of its master plan.

We believe that our master plan for Mineral King, which was approved by the Forest Service in January, 1969, offered the best possible protection of the surrounding environment under the constraints established by the Forest Service in 1965.

However, we have now obtained approval from the Forest Service to revise our master plan. These major revisions were developed over the past two years under the guidance of our Conservation Advisory Committee, and we will not proceed with this project unless this new plan is implemented.

Those who serve on our Conservation Committee are as follows:

Mr. Horace M. Albright,  
Former Director of the National Park Service,  
and Superintendent of Yellowstone National Park



Dr. Ira Gabrielson,  
President, Wildlife Management Institute

Mr. Thomas Kimball,  
Executive Director,  
National Wildlife Federation

Mr. Bestor Robinson,  
Former President and member of the Board of  
Directors, the Sierra Club;  
Formerly Chairman of Secretary of Interior's  
Advisory Committee on Conservation

Mr. Eivind T. Scoyen,  
Former Superintendent of Sequoia and  
Kings Canyon National Park and  
Associate Director of the National Park Service

Mr. William E. Towell,  
Executive Vice President,  
American Forestry Association

These nationally recognized conservationists, who support the development of Mineral King, have freely given of their time to advise the Disney organization and review its plans for the area.

We believe, and these men and the Forest Service concur, that the following recommendations will substantially improve both the aesthetic concept and operational control of this project:

1. As you know, the Disney plan now includes an electrically-powered, cog-assisted railroad to take visitors into the Mineral King valley from a point in Sequoia National Forest just east of its common boundary with Sequoia National Park. We propose the extension of this transportation system westward across Sequoia National Park to a termination point in the Oak Grove area, which is



below and outside the boundary of the National Park.

Preliminary engineering studies indicate that a two-track, cog-assisted, narrow gauge railway would be highly flexible, allowing the train to traverse the National Park along the general path of the existing access road, for which Tulare County holds the right-of-way.

The proposed route for the railway would pass below the Atwell Mill Grove of redwood trees in Sequoia National Park and enter the Mineral King area at a lower elevation than the proposed road, thereby eliminating any possibility whatsoever of any effect on these redwood trees.

We propose that the entire cog-assisted railroad be publicly owned. Walt Disney Productions would enter into a contract to operate the publicly-owned transportation system on a non-profit basis, during the 30-year term of the permit to be issued to Disney by the United States Forest Service. Income from the operation of the train would return only the cost of operation and maintenance, and the principal and interest required to finance its construction.

2. The extension of the cog-assisted railroad to a point below Sequoia National Park would allow many "gateway"



facilities to be removed from the Mineral King area. Among those facilities which could be located below the National Park would be the entire reception area, all administrative and many service facilities, the maintenance and storage shed for the trains, and a major portion of the employee housing. The plan would also eliminate the need for construction in the Mineral King area of a multi-level parking structure and all other facilities necessary to accommodate the visitor automobile.

The Forest Service plans development of rail served, walk-in summer camping opportunities near Silver City and to a lesser extent hike-in camping in the bowls above the valley. Capacity of the camping facilities will be determined after careful planning but would probably accommodate 500 people.

3. The original Forest Service prospectus, which stipulated that access to the area must be by automobile, made it necessary for Walt Disney Productions to plan enough recreational facilities to serve the largest number of visitors who could traverse the public road on any given day. The proposal outlined today will allow us to scale down the number of recreational facilities, such as restaurants and ski lifts, which will be necessary at ultimate development. Under the administration of the Forest Service, the number of visitors admitted to the area at any one time will be limited to a reasonable number, which will guarantee an enjoyable recreational experience for the guest. We expect that visitation will average 4,000 per day.



The Forest Service approves the concepts described in this statement.

The plan we have just proposed would have the following positive effects:

1. It would eliminate the need for the construction of a new access road across Sequoia National Park.

The proposed railroad would traverse the park along the general alignment of the existing access road, thereby eliminating the need for cutting a new route through the same area, as would have been required under the previous plan. The right-of-way for the narrow-gauge train would need to be less than half as wide as that required for the two-lane access road planned by the State of California.

It would still be necessary for the state to improve, but to a lesser standard, the existing road between State Route 198 and the Oak Grove area. This road would not cross any National Park or National Forest land. Since the road would now terminate below the snow line, and winter visitors would never have to drive under snow conditions, the plan will mean greater safety in transportation for the general public.

2. This proposal would drastically reduce the amount of state gas tax revenues necessary to provide adequate public access, saving California's taxpayers as much as \$30,000,000. The cog-assisted railroad would be



paid for by those who would use it.

3. The plan will provide a positive means of controlling, at all times, the number of visitors allowed into the Mineral King area, and would facilitate enforcement of new Forest Service and Park Service restrictions on the use of wilderness back country.
4. The new proposal will eliminate the need for a separate 66KV power line across the National Park, which had been estimated by Southern California Edison Company as necessary to provide the initial burst of power to start up the cog-assisted trains above the National Park, where the access road would previously have terminated.

The electrical requirements for the Mineral King valley area can now be supplied by a power line at a fraction of that voltage, which would be buried underground in the roadbed of the railroad.

5. Perhaps most significant is the fact that visitor automobiles will now be restricted from the entire Mineral King area. This will set a precedent similar to the type of access now being advocated by officials of the National Park Service, the National Forest Service and other recreational planners. It will provide a prototype demonstrating that the public will accept access to our National Parks and Forests by



means other than automobile. The train ride, in itself, will be a revolutionary and enjoyable experience for the general public.

We in the Disney organization believe that the plan presented today is economically practical, aesthetically and environmentally sound. It has always been our desire, and it was the desire of Walt Disney himself, to establish at Mineral King new standards of excellence in the development of recreational facilities on public land, consistent with the protection of the area's natural beauty. This objective can and will be achieved.

Walt Disney Productions has now met all the objections to the creation of recreational services and facilities at Mineral King, save one: Shall this area remain totally inaccessible in winter and available only to a select few in summer, or shall it be made available for the pleasure, benefit and enjoyment of everyone?

That is the remaining question. That is where we stand today. Now, where do we go from here?

The future of Mineral King is in the hands of those who feel the project is needed--the United States Forest Service; the Board of Supervisors of Tulare County; the many other public officials and private citizens and organizations who have advocated this project; and most of all the members of the general public, particularly the citizens of California, who have every right to the year-round enjoyment of our National Forests.



Since the Forest Service determined the public need in 1965, Walt Disney Productions has responded in good faith to the government's requirements. Our demonstrated concern for America's natural heritage is a matter of record. Walt Disney received 37 awards for his work in the field of conservation, including an Honorary Life Membership in the Sierra Club.

Therefore, we can no longer allow the good name and world-wide reputation of the Walt Disney organization to be attacked due to circumstances over which we have had no control. No longer will we allow our plans for this project to be misrepresented, as they often have been in the past.

We restate that Walt Disney Productions ceased all financial investment in this project three years ago, and that we withdrew from active advocacy of the project at that time. We have never been a party to the litigation between the Sierra Club and officials of the federal government, and we are not now.

As everyone knows, there are millions of acres in California's High Sierra where those who desire and are physically capable may backpack under primitive or wilderness conditions. Yet, there are all too few areas available to serve those who enjoy the wide variety of winter recreational activities and the high alpine summer experiences which would be available at Mineral King.

Thomas H. Kuchel, while serving California in the United States Senate, was a strong supporter of the recreational use of Mineral King. In an article written in 1967, he eloquently and wisely assessed the situation in the following words:



"We must make balanced judgments on whether any given resource should be developed commercially, developed for recreation, or maintained in a natural state. These are difficult judgments for which there are all too few guideposts. But if we fail to allocate a balanced portion of our total resources to each of these needs, sheer economic and demographic pressures will lay waste to the remaining wilderness we possess.

"People will continue to go to the mountains. There is no way to stop them. Indeed, why should we try to stop them? Is it not far better for their government to help set aside specific and suitable areas for their enjoyment and recreation? If we fail to develop selected areas, such as Mineral King, the 50 million people who will be in California before the end of this century will spill over the sides of the coastal cities and ravage the Sierra with unplanned and undirected enthusiasm for the vanishing outdoors.

"The best assurance that we will permanently protect portions of our natural heritage lies in orderly development to accommodate the demands of our growing population to be near nature.

"In Mineral King, California has an outstanding opportunity that should not be lost. It is a spectacularly unique area which, if carefully planned, can be developed into one of the finest recreational complexes of the world."

The public need for additional recreational areas clearly exists. We have presented a plan today which fulfills the public need, while at the same time provides maximum protection for the National Park and Forest Lands involved.

If the public agencies and officials responsible for the Mineral King area respond favorably to our plan, then Walt Disney Productions is ready to move ahead. We stand by, prepared to fulfill our commitments as the permittee for this project.

For the people of California, Mineral King truly represents an opportunity that should not be lost.



Statement of Douglas R. Leisz, Regional Forester  
Visalia, California, May 3, 1972

I want to reaffirm Mr. Walker's initial statements that the final decision responsibility for the development and character of Mineral King is with the government. It was the Forest Service issuance of a prospectus seeking competitive bids that brought the Disney development proposal. It was our stipulation that the area be made accessible by an all-weather road that placed one of the major constraints on the master plan.

The need for quality ski opportunity accessible to those who enjoy this form of worthwhile outdoor recreation sport in California has been recognized for years. In 1949 we issued the first prospectus for development of the fabulous potential at Mineral King. Because winter sports experts from all parts of the world had identified this area as having the natural characteristics - elevation, quality and quantity of snow, temperatures, and terrain to equal or surpass anything in the world. The Forest Service, therefore, did then and does now encourage its very careful development to serve that combination of need and natural resource quality that has been recognized for more than 30 years. But we are committed to the concept that its use must be available to the great body of the public who share its ownership - not limited to a few of the wealthy alone. We recognized that access to winter sports areas in Europe has in places been so costly to the user that only the rich can enjoy that use.

We are delighted to support this new concept of a non-polluting, environmentally compatible access system which can assure access to the ordinary family of skiers at a price within their reach. It will still make the area usable throughout the year in a unique fashion.



This extension of rail service will make it possible to eliminate the highway and depend on the railroad as a public carrier for all users of Mineral King, as well as for users of that portion of the Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park through which it passes. We recognize that this would restrict the use of the few parcels of private properties intermingled with the National Forest land in the valley. Therefore, we are fully committed to acquire these lands through purchase or to control them by means of conservation easements. The entire Mineral King area must be managed as a unit with everything available to the general public. The project which we now visualize would accomplish this, but the quality of Mineral King values would be in jeopardy without it.

The spectrum of outdoor recreation in California encompasses a great variety of activities nearly all of which are in short supply. It is not possible to accommodate all of these activities in any given area, and Mineral King is no exception. Thus the recreation vehicle camper, the motorcyclist, those who drive for pleasure, boat users, and others need to be provided for elsewhere. Mineral King will be a very special place for the types of use, including walk-in camping, that are not dependent on automotive transportation.

The approved master plan for Mineral King is still sound, but would have to be amended to be in accordance with the concept of sole access by electric railway. We intend to prepare and file an environmental statement covering the entire project and that procedure will provide for full public involvement.